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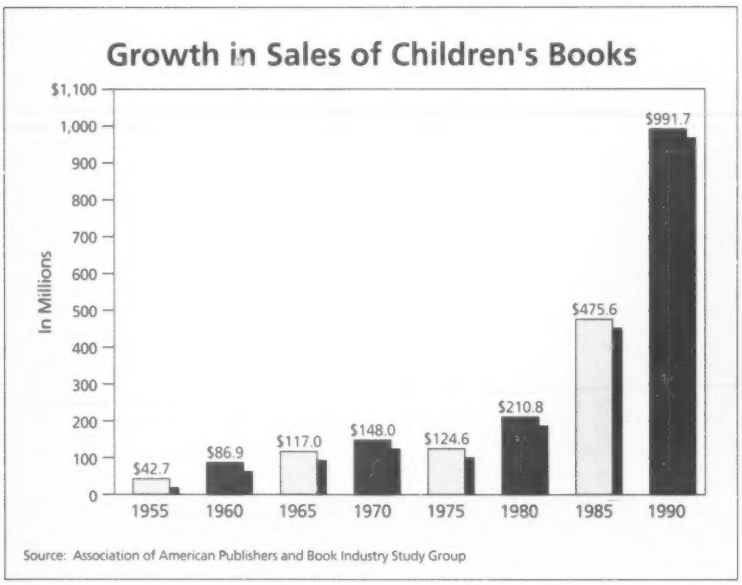
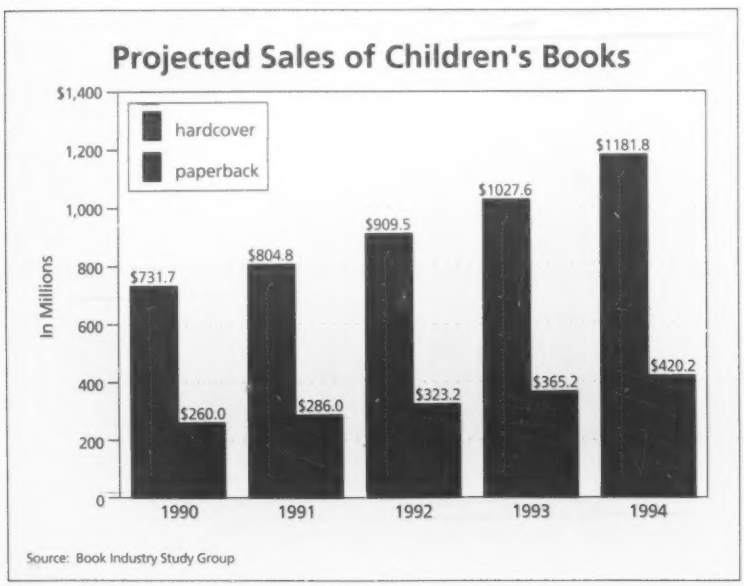
EDITED BY DIANE ROBACK

Children's Book Sales: Past and Future

In this statistical portrait, sales figures confirm a history of extraordinary growth; projections suggest a bright but changing future





In the world of publishing, children's books have indisputably been one of the most noticeable success stories of the 1980s. The decade's sales boom is particularly noteworthy when compared to the rate of growth from 1955 through 1980 (see chart at left), which was steady but unspectacular.

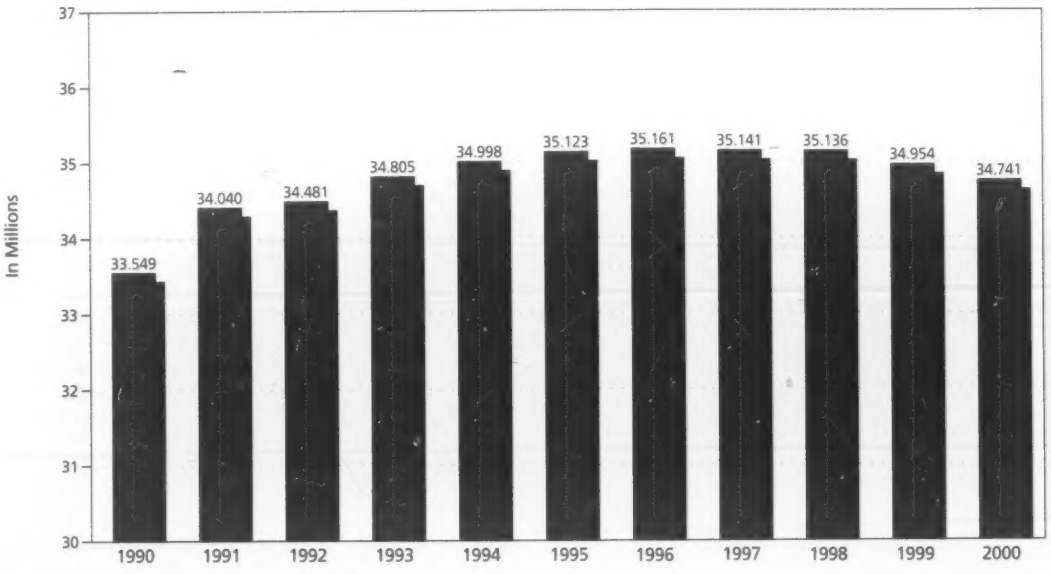
From 1980 to 1985, children's book sales more than doubled, and by the end of 1990 they will double *again*. Though it stands to reason that this level of growth cannot be sustained forever, Book Industry Study Group projections do not yet foresee a downturn: sales are expected to top $1 billion next year for the first time ever, and rise to over $1.5 billion in 1994.

As the children in the baby boomlet start to get older, the concentration in enrollment will of course shift upward into the higher school grades. K-8 enrollment is expected to peak in 1996 with 35,161,000 students, and then begin a slow decline. High school enrollments, however, should continue to grow each year. According to the Department of Education's estimates, in the year 2000 there will be two million more high school students than there are now, while in the K-8 grades there will be only a million more. Given the fact that K-8 represents more than twice as many grades as 9-12, and customarily almost three times as many students, the rate of growth projected for high school enrollments is nearly five times that of primary schoolers.

In luring these new teenagers to books, in competition with other and perhaps flashier forms of entertainment, book publishers clearly have their work cut out for them. Their challenge, in the century's last decade, lies in hanging onto the largest generation yet of children's book consumers, and turning them into lifetime readers and book buyers.

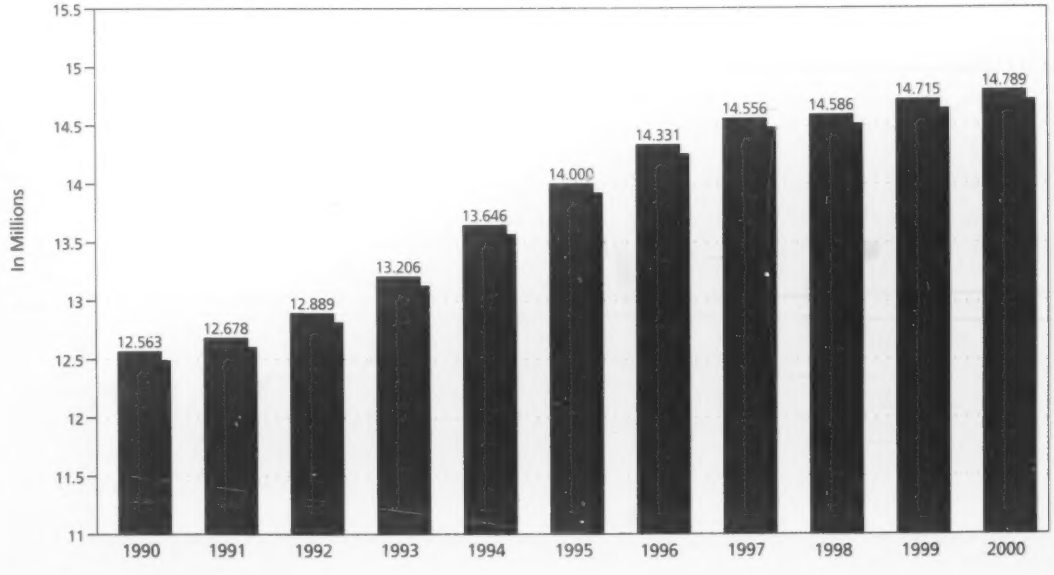
—D.R.

Projections of School Enrollments Through 2000: Grades K - 8



Source: U.S. Department of Education

Projections of School Enrollments Through 2000: Grades 9 - 12



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